

tax evasion? As far as I can tell, there is nothing to prevent the new agents the IRS will hire from being retasked at some point to other priorities, like investigating the views of conservative organizations before deciding whether or not to grant them tax-exempt status.

Closing the tax gap is a serious goal that deserves serious discussion, and it is possible that a targeted IRS funding increase for that purpose would be worth considering. But \$80 billion is a ridiculous number. In the words of one of President Obama's IRS chiefs: "I'm not sure you'd be able to efficiently use that much money."

And any plus-up in funding for the IRS should be accompanied by serious reforms, as well as many protections—not fewer protections—against IRS politicization.

While the Obama IRS scandal represents one of the more egregious abuses of the Agency's power, the IRS is well known for serial mismanagement, like Americans' inability to actually get through to the IRS with their questions.

The Washington Post reported in April that if you were calling the IRS this tax season, you had a 1-in-50—1-in-50—chance of actually getting to speak to a human being.

In May, the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration released a report on the 2021 filing season, which noted the IRS struggled to get new hires squared away on the job partially because it is—and here, I am going to have to quote from this report—"difficult to find working copiers . . . to be able to prepare training packages for new hires." That is right. And I wish those were the only Agency printer or copier problems, but they are not.

Let me quote from the inspector general's report again.

Audit teams continue to perform onsite walkthroughs at the Ogden, Utah, and Kansas City, Missouri, Tax Processing Centers to meet with staff to discuss challenges they are facing as it relates to addressing the ongoing backlogs of inventory. A major concern that surfaced during these walkthroughs was a lack of working printers and copiers. IRS management estimated that, as of March 30, 2021, 69 [or] (42 percent) of 164 devices used by the Submission Processing functions are unusable and others are broken but still functioning. IRS employees stated that the only reason they could not use many of these devices is because they are out of ink or because the waste cartridge container is full.

That is from the inspector general's report. I wish this were a joke, but that is straight out of the IG's report.

Hearing that, you might think that we don't need to worry about the weaponization of the IRS because the Agency isn't capable of work that sophisticated. But, as we know, that isn't true. The IRS was successfully weaponized for political purposes during the Obama administration, and the same thing could happen again, especially if Democrats succeed in removing protections against IRS abuse.

As our Nation's revenue-collecting Agency, the IRS is an Agency with immense power, and it is not a voluntary government program. Americans don't get to choose whether or not they interact with the IRS. For that reason, it is vital that there be as many safeguards in place as possible to prevent the IRS from abusing its power or being used for political purposes.

We have seen plenty of evidence that the IRS often doesn't use the money or resources that it currently has in a responsible way. And any increase in money for the IRS—which it certainly should not be anywhere close to \$80 billion—should be matched with significant reforms and increased accountability.

And H.R. 1, with its multitude of unwise and unconstitutional provisions even beyond the alarming provisions I have discussed today, must be stopped. Otherwise, the Biden legacy may be the weaponization of the IRS.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). The Senator from New Jersey.

NOMINATION OF KRISTEN M. CLARKE

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, it is a real honor to be rising today to speak in advance of the vote on Kristen Clarke's nomination to serve as the Attorney General of the Department of Justice.

If she is confirmed, Kristen Clarke will be tasked with overseeing the Justice Department's work to protect the civil rights of all Americans.

I have known Kristen Clarke for years. I have worked with her. I know her, and I can tell you that there can be no one better for this job.

To say that Kristen Clarke has an impressive resume is a gross understatement. She started her career at the Justice Department in the Civil Rights Division. She worked with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. She led the Civil Rights Bureau for the State of New York Attorney General's Office and most recently served as president and executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

No one could blame Kristen Clarke, after this entire career of service and all that she has given, if she decided to take a step back and find a less demanding job, perhaps a far more lucrative job. But Ms. Clarke has dedicated herself to the highest principles of our Nation—indeed, to the founding ideals of our country, formed with the Bill of Rights, focusing on this idea of civil rights for all.

This is not just her job. This has been her calling. This is her consistent conviction—to serve, to sacrifice for our Nation's most sacrosanct ideals.

She has chosen to serve this country now at a time when we need her leadership more than ever. She is an asset to our country, and I believe she will serve with extraordinary distinction as a guardian of our civil rights.

We need her experience. We need her expertise. We need her heart, her commitment, her deep thoughtfulness.

She is the daughter of immigrants, and after growing up in public housing, in a low-income household, Ms. Clarke made it to some of our most prestigious institutions and made it her cause to make the best out of herself. She is an incredible success story. She is a person who has overcome tremendous odds and advanced herself, not just for personal excellence but for public service. This makes her, in my book, a champion.

Yet there are still those in this confirmation process who want to say that Ms. Clarke is the wrong person for the job. They are actually using smear tactics and lies to try to misrepresent who Ms. Clarke is as a person. There is a saying, "Let the work I have done speak for me," and I wish folk would listen.

She has prosecuted hate crimes. She has defended people's voting rights. She has fought against religious discrimination. She has dedicated her career to the cause of equal justice under law.

Ms. Clarke is the right person for this job. She is exactly who we need. At a time when we are confronting rising hate crimes in America, dramatically more instances of vandalism and violence against Asian Americans, against Jewish Americans, against transgender Americans, we need someone leading the Civil Rights Division who will stand up for all Americans, who has experience prosecuting hate crimes and makes it clear in this Nation that all are created equal and endowed by their Creator with fundamental civil rights. That is who she is now and who she has been for her entire career.

There are folks and forces working to strip away and weaken and undermine these fundamental rights. We see efforts to weaken our democracy, to threaten our principles. We need someone who will stand up and affirm who we are as a people—a nation that believes in robust voting rights, a nation that believes in the equal dignity of all people, a nation that believes in protecting religious liberty. We need a champion now as much as ever. We need Kristen Clarke leading the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice.

And it is not just me saying that. It is just not Democrats saying that. There are over 70 bipartisan former State attorneys general. We see police leaders, law enforcement leaders endorsing her, prosecutors endorsing her, the Anti-Defamation League and 69 different local, State, and national Jewish organizations, all agreeing that Kristen Clarke is the right person to stand for us, to work for us, to fight for us, to champion for our precious civil rights at the Department of Justice.

So many different individuals from all across the political landscape, from all different backgrounds, and so many organizations representing all of our diversity are speaking out in a chorus of conviction about not just how good

Kristen Clarke is but how urgent her nomination is because of who she has shown herself to be time and again: an unassailable, impressive career of service, service, service. She is and has been a servant leader for all of her career; a person of profound integrity; someone whose passion, whose sacrifice, whose struggle in the pursuit of justice has already made this Nation better.

I will say something on a personal note in closing. I have worked with Kristen Clarke for years now on things that we have done together, like a bipartisan criminal justice reform bill.

I had the occasion years ago of meeting her when she was out in Washington with her son. He was a young guy, not that tall. Then, during her hearings in the Judiciary Committee, I saw her again present herself in an extraordinarily powerful manner, with grace and expertise, but I saw that young man now had grown up. He is a big guy. And it would be a leap of ego for me to say that I saw myself in this young man because he is probably a lot smarter than I was when I was his age and clearly is a better athlete, even though I will say for the record that the older I get, the better I am in sports.

But I think about her career, and then I align it to what she has done in raising a young Black man in America. While I couldn't project myself onto him, I thought a lot about my mom in her. My mom raised my brother and me in a nation that strove to be who we say we are, a nation of liberty and justice for all. But where she knew we were falling short, she didn't raise us to be bitter; she raised us to be better. She raised us by setting an example, a woman who—from sitting in at a lunch counter to desegregate a restaurant, to helping organize the March on Washington, she showed me by example. As James Baldwin has said, children are never good at listening to their elders, but they never fail to imitate them.

I want you all to know that in Kristen Clarke, we have an extraordinary American, an extraordinary person, and a great mom. And I know what she has done with her life. She has lived perhaps with the greatest principle of all, which is for us in this generation to make a better way for the next, for us to make a more perfect Union, for us to understand that the arc of the moral universe is indeed long but we must bend it more towards justice.

I tell my colleagues and urge you to confirm her to this sacrosanct and urgent position today because I am confident to the core of my being that she will not just make us proud, she will not just defend those who are having their rights trampled or their dignity marginalized, but that she will make a better way for an America that fulfills its promise, still not yet achieved, for us to be a nation with liberty and justice for all.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, here we go again. Just a few weeks ago, the Senate debated Vanita Gupta's nomination for Associate Attorney General, so let's review the bidding from that.

Gupta was eminently qualified for her role. She had support from the foremost law enforcement leaders and groups in the country. She had proven herself handling high-level government responsibilities. But Republicans set their hair on fire trying to take Ms. Gupta down. They grasped for something, anything, to dent her prospects. Eventually they landed on contorting an 8-year-old op-ed, even calling her accurate responses to their questions about it lies. It wasn't pretty.

Now we are back on the floor with Republican hair aflame again, this time over the nominee to run the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, Kristen Clarke. Like Ms. Gupta, Ms. Clarke is eminently qualified. She knows civil rights law inside and out. She has run one of the Nation's leading civil rights organizations. She is a superb, well-trained, experienced lawyer.

Conservatives have endorsed her, like President George W. Bush's DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff and former Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Steele. Law enforcement organizations like the Major Cities Chiefs Association and the International Association of Chiefs of Police support her.

She ought to have flown through committee and been a quick vote here on the floor, but, no, it is hair-on-fire time again. Why all the coifs aflame? Look behind the smokescreens and remember that the No. 1 strategy of the Republican Party for 2022 is to keep voters from voting. And guess what. Ms. Clarke will run the voting rights section of the Department, and Ms. Gupta, who used to run that same Civil Rights Division, will supervise her as Assistant Attorney General.

Behind the ruckus over Ms. Gupta and now Ms. Clarke is a dark money operation out to suppress the vote. It has the trade craft of a covert operation—cutouts, front groups, secret money—and that covert operation is now focused on preventing, as our colleague Senator WARNOCK says, "some people" from voting. And Ms. Clarke and Ms. Gupta will be the lawful, legal opposition to the dark money, voter-suppression apparatus.

Here is what we know. When Trump was in power, this covert op ran a dark money-funded apparatus within the Federalist Society to select Federal judges. For 4 years, the Federalist Society's operation was the gatekeeper to the Federal bench. Virtually every judicial candidate who passed through this dark money-funded turnstile was approved by big, anonymous donors out to control the courts. Donors got to approve judges and Justices who would have their backs.

That dark money turnstile was step 1. Step 2 was dark money-funded political campaigns for Senate confirmation of the nominees who got through the turnstile. For Trump's three Supreme Court nominees, this was done by the Judicial Crisis Network, headquartered literally down the hall from the Federalist Society—not just the same building, the same hallway, but they also share staff. In each Supreme Court confirmation, a \$15 million or a \$17 million check from a secret donor would fund the advertising campaign.

Step 3 is dark money-funded front organizations appearing before the donor-selected Justices in orchestrated flotillas with common donors behind them, undisclosed to the Court.

When Trump lost, of course, step 1 and step 2 lost their salience and closed up shop. But with Trump judges still on the court, these front groups are still at it. In one case before the Supreme Court right now, 50 organizations—50 organizations—that filed briefs received funding through right-wing groups involved in this operation.

Dark money funding can't be traced back to its original donors, obviously, because it is dark money, but a 2019 Washington Post investigation revealed that one guy, Leonard Leo, while executive vice president of the Federalist Society, from 2014 to 2017 coordinated \$250 million—a quarter of a billion dollars—across a network of the front groups engaged in this court capture operation. Recent testimony in my Courts Subcommittee raised that number to over \$400 million—nearly half a billion dollars—through 2018. Four hundred million is a lot of money, but a captured court, that is a pearl beyond price.

This Leo operation worked wonderfully during the Trump Presidency. Donors got their judges. Judicial Crisis Network and Leonard Leo got their dark money. But then that Post investigation came out, and Trump's polling started to tank. So, like a burned agent, Leonard Leo bugged out.

Where did he bug out to? Well, Leo surfaced early last year with a group called the Honest Elections Project. These phony-baloney front groups love to have the name that is the exact opposite of what they are actually doing. So this one is called the Honest Elections Project, and it has been running voter suppression activities in key battleground States, sending threatening letters to local election officials, and filing lawsuits to restrict voting—and, of course, all dark money-funded.

But poke a little further and you discover that the Honest Elections Project is a legal alias of something called the Judicial Education Project, which is—you guessed it—the sister group to Judicial Crisis Network—yep, Leo's judicial confirmation attack-ad organization. And, of course, behind this covert op was dark money, much of it run through DonorsTrust, the identity-laundering, dark money ATM established by the Kochs' donor network. Before it took on this Honest

Elections Project alias, more than 99 percent of the Judicial Education Project's 2018 revenue was a single, anonymous \$7.8 million donation that came through, of course, DonorsTrust. There is no way to know who cut that check.

What does all this dark money finagling and front group subterfuge tell us? As a reporter for the Guardian observed, the Honest Elections Project, so-called, melds two goals of the right-wing dark money operation: One, pack the Federal judiciary, and two, bring voting rights cases before the packed courts. Rigging elections by keeping "some people" from voting is now a Republican priority, and if Trump judges will help, so much the better.

Just recently, we actually learned more about the covert voter suppression operation. The watchdog group Documented and the magazine Mother Jones uncovered a video of a presentation by the dark money group Heritage Action to its top donors. In the video, the presenter brags about getting what she called "key provisions"—"key provisions"—into voter suppression legislation in dozens of capitals around the country.

She tells the donors, and I am quoting here, "In some cases, we actually draft them for them"—they actually draft the laws for the State legislatures—"or," she said, "we have a sentinel"—a sentinel; what a creepy word—"we have a sentinel on our behalf give them the model legislation so it has that grassroots, from-the-bottom-up type of vibe." Big donors love that grassroots, from-the-bottom-up type of vibe.

There is lots of dark money that fuels this covert op. Heritage Action says it plans to spend \$24 million in eight battleground States to "create an echo chamber" of relentless lobbying for voter suppression bills. They say they will be coordinating with known Koch network groups like the Susan B. Anthony List, Tea Party Patriots, and FreedomWorks.

This operation is the kind of stuff that we might want our intelligence services to do in enemy countries to create disruption and discord and provide secret influence. The idea that creepy billionaires are running covert operations in and against our own country, that ought to make you cringe.

Not only is this behavior morally corrupt, it may have broken rules. One State legislature has already floated an ethics probe into Heritage Action's sentinels jamming phony bills through their chamber.

So back to Senate Republicans getting their hair on fire over Kristen Clarke and Vanita Gupta. These two women scare the daylights out of this dark money operation behind Republican voter suppression. Ms. Clarke knows the Voting Rights Act cold; she won voting rights cases against voter suppression laws all over the country. Put Jim Crow 2.0 up against a Depart-

ment of Justice Civil Rights Division led by Kristen Clarke, and that dark money voter suppression operation has a problem. So the big dark money donors behind this covert operation will raise whatever ruckus they can—first, to try to stop Vanita Gupta, which didn't work, and now to stop Kristen Clarke, which won't work—all in an effort to protect their dark money scheme to prevent some people from voting. You have to look behind the smokescreen sometimes to understand what is going on. It is not pretty, but it is the truth.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be able to conclude my remarks before the vote begins.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, about 50 years ago, William Proxmire rose in this esteemed body and told us about government waste. He called it the Golden Fleece Award. They were studying things like dating and love and what makes love, and we had these great scientific studies about love. These are William Proxmire's words from the early 1970s. He was a conservative Democrat.

He says:

I object to this [study on love] because no one—not even the National Science Foundation—can argue that falling in love is a science; not only because I'm sure that even if they spend \$84 million or \$84 billion they wouldn't get an answer that anyone would believe. I'm also against [this study on love] because I don't want the answer.

I believe that 200 million other Americans want to leave some things in life a mystery, and right at the top of things we don't [need] to know is why a man falls in love with a woman and vice versa.

Stirring words. The Golden Fleece Award—I remember as a kid everybody talked about it. It was in the newspapers. So what have we done to curb the wasteful appetite, the abuse of government that has happened at the National Science Foundation since 1972? Not a damn thing.

Here is one of my other favorites from William Proxmire's days. The FAA was named for spending \$57,000 on a study of the physical measurements of 432 airline stewardesses. These included the distance from knee to knee while sitting and the length of the buttocks. Fifty-eight thousand dollars—this was your government money being put to good use.

So fast forward, and we spend about \$8 billion a year with the National Science Foundation. Is it getting any better? Are they doing a better job at overseeing their money? Well, I don't know. This bill is going to increase their funding by 68 percent. There is \$29 billion in this bill for the National Science Foundation. So don't you think the American people deserve to know where their money is being spent?

This was from their sister Agency, the NIH, but you know we can't get started without talking about it. This is over \$800,000 to study whether or not Japanese quail are more sexually promiscuous on cocaine. I am not making this up—\$800,000 of taxpayer money to study whether Japanese quail are more sexually promiscuous on cocaine.

Do you think we could have just polled the audience? Do you think we could have just said: What do you think? Because that is sort of the answer. The answer is yes. And yet your government spent 800 grand on that. And then when we pointed it out 5 years ago, did they do anything to reform it? No. They are here today to give the Agencies that are doing this research more money.

Another one that I think is quite revealing is this study that is about Panamanian male frog calls. You have about half a million dollars, and they wanted to know whether or not the male mating call is different in the country than it is in the city.

Now, coming from a rural State like Kentucky, I can tell you the male mating call is different in the country than it is in the city. But nobody in Kentucky wants a half a million dollars spent on a Panamanian frog's male mating call. This is not a good use of money.

So if someone told you your government was spending this money, would you give them more? Would you give the Agency more if they were doing this or less? I think less.

In looking at the National Science Foundation's spending, we also found that they spent \$30,000 studying Ugandan gambling habits. Really? We are studying why people gamble in Uganda, why there is a black market in Uganda. Well, do you know what? I think we know the reason. When government oppresses business and regulates business to death, they go to the black market. If you make something illegal, you often get more of it. But we spent \$30,000 traveling over to Uganda to study their gambling habits—utter waste of money. We should not reward these people with more money.

We spent about half a million on a video game. This is an app for your phone. I know we all need things to do when we should be working or at school. This is an app for schoolchildren to teach them alarmism over climate change. So you can click on the app, and it will scare you to death that California is going to be underwater in 100 years—none of which is true, all of which is alarmism, and a half a million dollars spent by the government to alarm our schoolchildren is not a good idea.

This next study points out a problem with funding, in general, in our government. You give funds for something that ostensibly might be a good cause. So a couple of years ago, they gave money for autism—\$700,000 for autism. And you think, well, autism, you know, even myself, as conservative as I am, I